



FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

18 February 2019

The Foreign Affairs Council, chaired by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, will start at 9.00 with a discussion on **current affairs** allowing ministers to review pressing issues on the international agenda.

The Council will exchange views on the **Horn of Africa**, following the High Representative Mogherini's visit to the region the previous week.

The Council will have a comprehensive discussion on **Ukraine**, including the upcoming Presidential and parliamentary elections, scheduled on 31st March and 27th October respectively, as well as the reform process and the security situation in the country.

Foreign ministers will also discuss the situation in **Syria**, in particular the latest developments on the ground, and also in view of the third Conference on Supporting the future of Syria and the region, to be held in Brussels on 12-14 March 2019.

Over lunch, foreign ministers will discuss the situation in **Venezuela**, taking into account the latest developments and following the first meeting of the International Contact Group in Montevideo on 7 February.

The Council is expected to adopt several decisions and conclusions without debate, including conclusions on the situation in Yemen, on climate diplomacy and on EU priorities in UN human rights fora in 2019.

Press opportunities:

+/- 08.50 Doorstep by High Representative Federica Mogherini

+/- 14.30 Press conference following the Foreign Affairs Council

[Press conferences and public events via video streaming](#)
[Video coverage in broadcast quality \(MPEG4\) and photo gallery](#)

¹ This note has been drawn up under the responsibility of the press office.

Current affairs

The Foreign Affairs Council will start with a discussion on current affairs. The High Representative and foreign ministers may refer to the situation in the **Democratic Republic of Congo** after the swearing in of President Tshisekedi. They may also highlight the entry into force of the **Prespa agreement** allowing for the change of name of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Horn of Africa

The Council will discuss the Horn of Africa. The High Representative is expected to inform ministers to the region the previous week. . The discussion will provide the opportunity to take stock of the developments in the Horn of Africa since last foreign ministers' discussion at the Council of 25 June 2018.

In particular, ministers are expected to exchange views on the positive political developments between Ethiopia and Eritrea. In its conclusions of 19 November 2018 on Ethiopia, the Council welcomed the historic peace agreements between Eritrea and Ethiopia. The reestablishment of diplomatic relations, the opening of land borders and connections, as well as high-level bilateral political visits have created momentum for ending decades of hostility between neighbours.

Foreign ministers may discuss how the EU can support the unprecedented opportunity to accelerate reconciliation and economic integration for all the countries of the Horn of Africa. The EU is working actively to strengthen its partnership with the region which shares many common interests with the EU, from tackling climate change to boosting investment, to better managing migration and creating opportunities for youth.

The EU is strongly engaged in the Horn of Africa, through political dialogue, its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions (EU NAVFOR Operation Atalanta, EUCAP Somalia, EUTM Somalia), and development cooperation. Through regional and bilateral programmes and the Trust Fund for Africa, the EU is providing over €3 billion to the Horn of Africa (2014-2020). The EU has a Special Representative to the Horn of Africa, Alexander Rondos, whose mandate is to contribute actively to regional and international efforts to achieve lasting peace, security and development in the region and to enhance the quality, intensity and impact of the EU's multifaceted engagement in the Horn of Africa.

[Horn of Africa and Red Sea: Council adopts conclusions 25 June 2018](#)

[Statement by High Representative Mogherini on Reconciliation and Economic Integration in the Horn of Africa, 14 November 2018](#)

[Ethiopia: Council adopts conclusions, 19 November 2018](#)

[High Representative Federica Mogherini meets with Ethiopian Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed, 24 January 2019](#)

Ukraine

On the 5th anniversary of Euromaidan, the Council will exchange views on Ukraine. Ahead of Presidential elections (31 March), the discussion will be an opportunity for a broad exchange of views, covering the reform process as well as the security and humanitarian situation, in particular in eastern Ukraine and the Sea of Azov.

Ministers will discuss the reform process in Ukraine and how the EU can help maintaining the reform momentum, fostering the implementation of the Association Agreement / Deep Comprehensive and Free Trade Agreement, and ensuring the sustainability of the results achieved. They may highlight the significant progress that has been made in reform efforts over the past years, and the importance of maintaining the pace, including in the pre-election period. They may also note the progress in economic reforms, including of the tax system, in the banking sector and public procurement system. Ministers may underline the need to keep a particular focus on the fight against corruption, the rule of law and the reform of the judiciary and prosecution. Reform in the energy sector is also particularly important.

Foreign ministers may also discuss how the EU can help to ensure that the presidential and parliamentary elections in Ukraine are well-conducted and to strengthen the respect of democracy, the rule of law, the freedom of media, an enabling environment for civil society, and the protection of minorities in the country. Ministers are also expected to exchange views on the security and humanitarian situation in the conflict-affected regions of Ukraine, and how the EU can help to improve this situation. They will also discuss the situation in and around the Azov Sea and increased militarisation of the area, the possible EU socio-economic support for the region and how to ensure unhindered and free passage through the Kerch Strait.

They will reiterate their full support for Ukraine's independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty. The EU continues to condemn the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol by the Russian Federation, the building of the Kerch Strait Bridge without Ukraine's consent and the further militarisation of the peninsula and the Azov Sea. The EU continues to support the diplomatic efforts to find a lasting peaceful solution to the conflict in eastern Ukraine through the complete implementation of the Minsk Agreements. It expects the immediate release of all illegally-detained Ukrainian citizens in Russia and the Crimean Peninsula.

The Council last discussed the latest developments in Ukraine at its meeting on 10 December 2018. Foreign ministers recalled their utmost concern about the dangerous increase in tensions in the Azov Sea and Kerch Strait. On the same day, the High Representative and foreign ministers exchanged views with Ukrainian foreign minister Pavlo Kimkin.

[EU relations with Ukraine \(background information\)](#)

Syria

The Council will discuss Syria in light of the recent developments in Syria and ahead of the third Brussels conference, 'Supporting the future of Syria and the region' (12-14 March 2019).

Ministers are expected to discuss ways to support the new UN Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen, who started his work on 7 January 2019, in his efforts to find a permanent, sustainable, negotiated solution. High Representative spoke to him and expressed the EU's full and continued support for his efforts and the Geneva UN-led peace process for Syria, which remains key to the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2254, for a credible political transition in Syria as the only sustainable long term solution to the conflict.

Foreign ministers are expected to reiterate the key messages agreed in the Council conclusions of 16 April 2018. In the conclusions, the EU repeated that any sustainable solution to the conflict requires a genuine political transition in line with UNSCR 2254 and the 2012 Geneva Communiqué negotiated by the Syrian parties within the UN-led Geneva process and remains committed to the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian state. The Council also underlined that accountability and transitional justice based on due process that facilitates a genuine national reconciliation are a prerequisite for a lasting peace in Syria. It further reiterated that the EU will be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria only when a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition is firmly under way.

Foreign ministers will also discuss the preparation for the third Brussels conference on 'Supporting the future of Syria and the region' that will take place from 12 to 14 March 2018. The overarching objective of the conference is to support the Syrian people and further mobilise the international community behind the work to achieve a lasting political solution to the Syria crisis. Like the two previous editions, the conference will also address the most critical humanitarian and resilience issues affecting Syrians and communities hosting Syrian refugees, both inside the country and in the region. It will also reaffirm the international community's political and financial support for Syria's neighbours, notably Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, as well as Iraq and Egypt. It is expected to be the main pledging event for Syria and the region in 2019.

The Council put in place a series of autonomous restrictive measures in 2011. They target individuals responsible for the violent repression of the civilian population in Syria, as well as individuals or entities associated with them. 270 individuals and 72 entities are currently targeted by a travel ban and an asset freeze, with the most recent additions made on 21 January (11 businessmen and 5 companies supporting and/or benefiting from the Syrian regime). On the same day, the Council also sanctioned five Syrians directly involved in the activities of the Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC), which is in charge of the development and the production of chemical weapons. The Council has stated that the EU will consider further restrictive measures against Syria as long as the repression continues.

[Syria: Council response to the crisis](#)

[EU to host third Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region 27 September 2018](#)

[High Representative Mogherini speaks to new UN Special Envoy for Syria, Geir Pedersen 8 January 2019](#)

[Syria: EU adds eleven businessmen and five entities to sanctions list, 21 January 2019](#)

[Syria: Council adopts conclusions 16 April 2018](#)

Venezuela

Over lunch, foreign ministers will discuss the situation in Venezuela, following the first meeting of the International Contact group (7 February, Montevideo, Uruguay). The EU decided to proceed with the setting-up of the ICG on Venezuela with the aim of contributing to create conditions for a political and peaceful process to emerge, enabling Venezuelans to determine their own future, through the holding of free, transparent and credible elections, in line with the country's Constitution.

The Contact Group brings together the EU and eight of its member states (France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom) and countries from Latin America (Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Uruguay). The first meeting of the ICG reiterated calls for both a political solution and for the holding of free and fair presidential elections.

In this context, foreign ministers are expected to discuss next steps and the way forward towards a peaceful and inclusive democratic solution, as the only sustainable way out of the current political impasse and the severe social crisis it has provoked. As indicated in the declaration of 26 January, the EU fully supports the National Assembly, as the only democratic legitimate body in Venezuela whose powers need to be restored and respected, including the prerogatives and safety of its members. The EU strongly called for the urgent holding of free, transparent and credible presidential elections in accordance with internationally democratic standards and the Venezuelan constitutional order.

Foreign ministers may also discuss the dire humanitarian situation in Venezuela and what the EU can do to further help the Venezuelan people and the hosting communities of neighbour countries. The EU has so far mobilised €62 million support of the Venezuelan people.

The Council has, since 13 November 2017, put in place restrictive measures against Venezuela. These include an embargo on arms and on equipment for internal repression, as well as a travel ban and an asset freeze on 18 officials responsible for human rights violations. The restrictive measures aim to help foster democratic shared solutions that can bring political stability to the country and allow it to address the pressing needs of the population.

[Venezuela: the Council response to the crisis](#)

[Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the situation in Venezuela, 26 January 2019](#)

[Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the new mandate of President Maduro \(press release, 10/01/2019\)](#)

[Joint statement by High Representative Federica Mogherini and the President of Uruguay, Tabaré Vázquez, on the inaugural meeting of the International Contact Group on Venezuela in Montevideo on 7 February 2019](#)

[Remarks by High Representative Federica Mogherini at the press conference following the first inaugural meeting of the International Contact Group on Venezuela, 7 February 2019](#)

[International Contact Group, terms of reference](#)

Other items

The Council is expected to adopt a number of decisions and conclusions without debate.

Council conclusions on Yemen

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on the situation in Yemen. The Council is expected to reaffirm its commitment to the unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Yemen.

The Council is expected to welcome the "Stockholm Agreement" reached between representatives of the Yemeni parties under the auspices of the United Nations in December 2018. The conclusions are due to state that the EU and its Member States will continue to actively engage with all the parties to the conflict and are committed to further support the UN-led political process, including through political dialogue with relevant regional actors, with the aim of continuing to produce tangible results, ending the conflict and fostering an improved regional environment.

The Council will reaffirm that only a negotiated and inclusive political solution can end the conflict in Yemen. It is expected to call on all parties to maintain their commitment to the UN-led process in view of the upcoming talks, and reiterate sustainable peace can only be achieved through negotiations involving the meaningful participation of all parties concerned, including civil society, women and youth.

At this critical juncture for the future of Yemen, the Council will reiterate the EU's full support for the UN-led political process and the work of UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and of the United Nations mission to support the Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA). The EU has contributed with over 560 million euros of assistance since the beginning of the conflict.

[EU-Yemen relations, factsheet](#)

[Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the consultations in Sweden between the representatives of the Yemeni parties and the Stockholm Agreement, 16/12/2018](#)

Conclusions on climate change diplomacy

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on climate diplomacy. The Council is due to recall that climate change is a direct and existential threat, which will spare no country. The conclusions will note that the world is already witnessing multiple devastating impacts of climate change, yet action to stem it remains insufficient.

The Council is expected to reaffirm its steadfast commitment to the Paris Agreement as the essential multilateral framework governing global action to deal with climate change and to welcome the positive outcome of the 24th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 24).

The conclusions will cover the following aspects:

- ambition in climate action is not only about reducing greenhouse gas emissions, it is also about addressing the impacts of climate change on peace and security;
- against the backdrop of scientific warnings, 2019 is a critical year for accelerating domestic climate action and raising global ambition in the context of the pursuit of sustainable development, with leadership from the United Nations
- the EU's leadership on climate action is founded on a progressive stance at home, with ministers supporting the European Commission's strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate-neutral economy.
- further enhancing EU international climate cooperation and support.

[Climate Diplomacy: Council adopts conclusions 26 February 2018](#)

Conclusions on EU priorities in UN human rights fora in 2019

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on EU priorities in UN human rights fora in 2019. It is due to reaffirm the EU's commitment to promoting and protecting human rights, democracy and the rule of law, which also play a key role in ensuring peace and sustainable security, as cornerstones of its external action.

The conclusions will state that the EU will continue to denounce human rights violations and abuses wherever they are committed, to call on states and non-state actors to prevent them and bring them to an immediate end, as well as to seek justice and accountability.

The Council will reaffirm that the EU will use all available tools and fora to fulfil its commitments to human rights and promote human rights globally, including in the framework of the United Nations Human Rights Council, the United Nations General Assembly, the United Nations Security Council and any other relevant fora, consistent with the EU Treaty and the UN Charter.

The EU is set to reiterate that all human rights are to be realised worldwide, whether they are civil and political rights, or economic, social and cultural rights, and that there is no hierarchy of human rights.

Council conclusions on EU priorities at UN human rights fora are adopted on a yearly basis. They set out the main lines of action for the EU at UN human rights fora in the coming months. Council conclusions on EU priorities at UN human rights fora are adopted on a yearly basis.

[Protection and promotion of human rights](#)